

An Evening with the TCC Elders

By Various Speakers

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Tuesday, April 11, 2023

Truth Community Church

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Don Green. Well, in a moment I'm going to invite our other three elders to come up so we can have a little bit of a discussion tonight, family discussion about different matters at Truth Community Church. As we've had different elder meetings over the past few months, some of the conversations have been really rich, encouraging and edifying to me, and together we thought that it might be encouraging and edifying to you also to kind of sit in on some of the things that we've been talking about.

On Sunday, Nathaniel alluded to an important passage about church leadership. It's a description of how Paul viewed leadership and how he conducted himself, and it's what we aspire to, however imperfectly, in leadership at Truth Community Church. Paul said to the Thessalonians, he said, "we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed--God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ." And this is the point I wanted to get to, "But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us." And then a little further down, he changes the metaphor, but it's the same parental picture when he says in verse 10, "You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory." The gentleness of a mother, Paul said, that's what his ministry was like in Thessalonica. The care and power of a father, for lack of a better word, being stated and all of those things exemplifying what his leadership was like among them. Love and accountability and concern, just like a parent has for their children, as they try to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, we see those things. And what I trust is that that kind of sets a good frame as the men come forward.

Well, welcome, Andrew and Dane and Nathaniel. Since Nathaniel and I have done the preaching over the past couple of three weeks, it's really going to fall on you guys to carry this time together here. Before we get into matters of church life, I just wanted to kind of lob a couple of softballs to Andrew and Dane. On Sunday, I announced that we have two church-wide fellowships coming up, one on the first Friday in May, the other on the first Friday in June. We're going to show a couple of documentaries which feature our own Andrew Snelling. It's pretty cool. May 5th is "Genesis History," and then on

June 2nd is "Genesis History, Mountains After the Flood." Andrew, maybe you could tell us what we can expect and why these documentaries are important.

Andrew Snelling. Well, it's a bit of a story. Back in 2014, I had a phone call from a guy in Nashville who runs homeschool programs and he's into documentary making. His daughter had been asking him questions about Genesis in particular, and he'd got a copy of my book and had read it, and so he got in contact with me and wanted my advice, and he also asked me about others who could answer some of the other questions that he had. Well, out of that came the "Is Genesis History" movie. We were able to enlist the help of Dr. Del Tackett, who worked in the Bush White House as a military guy. He went to "Focus on the Family," involved in the Truth Project. He'd been on a Grand Canyon trip with me back in 2008, and so he's the host of the program and in the program is a series of interviews with different specialists on location, in the scenery, etc. So I'm out in the Flagstaff area in front of a volcano talking about volcanic eruptions and how we measure time, and then we go down to Sedona and we talk about the rock layers that you can see there around Sedona, fossils, all sorts of issues. So the whole objective is to show that Genesis is history, that what we see in the world around us doesn't make any sense unless we read the book of Genesis.

Don. As literal history.

Andrew. As literal history. So that premiered in 2016, and a lot of people haven't seen that, and so it's good for everyone to see that. Well, the back story for the next documentary is that I first applied in late 2013 to the National Park Service, to the Grand Canyon National Park, to go and get some samples. You just can't walk in and take rock samples, and that's fair enough because there's all sorts of issues, safety and all the rest of it. They stonewalled me and gave me a hard time. I'd had previous research projects in the Grand Canyon, no problems, but now I was getting kickback. So because we knew that they had a history of doing this against Bible-believing Christians, the Alliance Defending Freedom got involved, and long story short, because they kept on stonewalling, in mid-2017 we filed a lawsuit in a federal court in Phoenix to sue the Secretary for the Interior all the way down to the Superintendent of the Grand Canyon National Park and the whole case was settled within six weeks because we had all the back story, we had all the documentation of the worldview discrimination of the park officials.

And so when we went into the canyon on a research trip, which we got permission for as well, in August 2017, Alliance Defending Freedom realized that the park service could play funny games and accuse us of doing something wrong in the park. So they settled on a videographer. So he recorded everything that we did in the park. Now the documentary producer of the "Is Genesis History" movie that had come out earlier in 2017, heard about this and knew about that, and he got a hold of the footage and also was given to "Answers in Genesis" for their use as well. So he's built this second documentary. It's centered on the research that I'm doing in the Grand Canyon, on location in the canyon, also the lab work that we've done and discussing it. Del Tackett is the host. But here's the thing, again it's demonstrating that Genesis is real history, that what we see in God's world confirms

what we read in God's word. We're not trying to prove the Bible from science. The objective in all of this and why we want to show people is that we want to show people that there are answers to the questions that they have that confirms God's word and therefore they can trust God's word. They might not understand all the details, but they can trust God's word in the early chapters of Genesis with creation, the flood, the Tower of Babel, because in there we learn about the history of the origin of two genders, the origin of marriage, man and a wife, the origin of sin, the origin of death and why we need a Savior. So that literal history is the foundation for the gospel and when people are confident about that literal history in Genesis, they are bolder in their witness to the Gospel because they can defend not only the gospel, but all the way back to Genesis in a literal history.

So what I was looking at in the Grand Canyon, just to pique your interest, is the canyon is carved through a plateau and at the edge of the plateau the rock layers are bent. And the secular view is that the layers were deposited 500 million years ago supposedly and the bending occurred 450 million years later. Now you would expect after all that time that the rocks would be as hard as concrete and therefore when you tried to bend them they would shatter. But what do we see? We see nice smooth bends. And so this is also related, by the way, it's a bigger story that unfolds in the documentary. That folding, that bending of the rock layers is related to the event that produced the Rocky Mountains all the way from the tip of the Andes in South America right up through Alaska because it's the same mountain chain. And so that's why the subtitle is "Mountains After the Flood." But basically the research was designed to go at the microscopic level as well as the macroscopic level to show that the layers were bent when they were still soft, when they were still wet, having been deposited just months earlier during the flood. And so that immediately wipes out hundreds of millions of supposed years of earth history and that is critical because the time issue is the biggest stumbling block for most Christians. They look at the world and they think it looks old. No, it doesn't look old. It's only old because we think it's old because of our everyday experience. As I like to illustrate to people, if you were to go into the garden of Eden 30 minutes after Adam was created by God, you would think he was a 30-year-old man. But no, he's only 30 minutes old because God only created him earlier. And so we have to inform people and educate them so that they're not blindsided and threatened by skeptics who throw these questions at it.

So that's what you can expect in these movies and I'm excited about it not because I'm involved in it, but simply because I know the impact that it can have on you as it's having on impact. The first movie has been literally seen by millions of people around the globe and there's a lot of interest in this and therefore it's for Christians everywhere.

Don. Yeah, and so this is foundational to not just a right understanding of the world, but it's a foundational matter for understanding all of the Bible, isn't it?

Andrew. Yes. It all makes sense. You know, if you understand the beginning of the story, you'll understand all the thread all the way through; the redemptive story begins in Genesis and it goes all the way through into the New Testament.

Don. Well, we are excited to see those films. We are grateful for your lifetime of research in these matters and for your leading kind of the way for others to follow in defending God's words. So that's the first Friday of May, first Friday of June if you want to mark those on your calendars. We'll be showing it in here. We've purchased some equipment to make a nice presentation and I know you're going to enjoy it. So thank you, Andrew.

Dane, if you know Dane, you just kind of wind up one thing and then it goes.

Dane. What's that one thing?

Don. You probably have an interest in telling us about your upcoming trip to Mexico, don't you?

Dane. Yeah, I can speak on Mexico anytime. I guess that's the one thing you wind me up on. For anyone that's new here to Truth Community, I've been going down to Mexico to the Mexican Indian Training Center for 21 years, two and three times a year. And so if you're new and haven't heard this, we do something a little bit different with our mission policy. We don't really have a mission budget. There's not a line item that monthly is for missions. What we do is, as I go down, I take a love offering from you all and that way we can support instead of sending a missionary to Mexico and having to support them monthly and have administrative cost and the cost of sending them there and keeping them there, the problem with learning a language, learning a culture, being accepted by the people. What we do is I take a love offering down and give it to the national pastors and churches that are in association with the Mexican Indian Training Center. And every trip we reevaluate how that money is being spent and we prioritize specific needs instead of just sending a check monthly and not knowing really how it's being spent, if it's being effective. As we reassess every single time we go, it's bang for your buck. You see a need, you meet a need.

We'll be going this trip July the 15th through the 22nd. I'm excited. There's a handful of people that are going from our church and then there's several other churches. I just talked to the coordinator today from Bible Chapel. That's Pastor Kevin Landis' church. I spoke with him and he said that we're picking up new people all the time. I think we're up to 16 in the group, so it's going to be a good group. I'm excited because Nathaniel's going with me this time and I just hope to build that continuity. I know I'm not going to be around another probably 20 years or so, I don't know, but we can pass the baton off to a younger man and keep that work going.

Don. Now are you planning for Nathaniel to continue also in your dental work that you do when you're down there?

Dane. It's Mexico.

Don. So he could. Yeah.

Dane. I'm sorry Hispanic friends out there. We'll be collecting a love offering again. You people have been incredibly, incredibly generous to the work down there. And the last time we went, I came back and I read an email from Pastor Liberado and his church is

one of the poorest churches in the area. It was one of the first churches that was associated with MITC. So when they first established that church, there was a lot of interest when the Americans would come down. There's multiple groups that go down during the summertime, not just our church. Multiple groups would go over to that church but as time moved along, other churches were built that are bigger, have just a different population in them, and so Liberado's church doesn't get the attention that it used to as far as, you know, they're supported, but they don't get the attention from the Americans. You don't make that many trips to theirs. But I always intentionally go to his church, and so one of our love offerings last time went to him and he wrote that email back and he said, you know, you don't know what it's like, you don't know what it's like to have another church care for us the way you care for us. And this money that you've given us, this was right after it was availability, we were able to go because the pandemic shut the door to Mexico, this is the first time we were able to go back and to give him that love offering. He says this money will help so many families that have had COVID. And when the breadwinner goes down in Mexico, families live generational. It's grandparents to grandchildren in one household. If the breadwinner goes down, there's no welfare system, there's no government assistant. All they have is one another and the churches to help them sustain life. And so he was just so humble in his acceptance of that money.

So again, I want to thank you beforehand before you even start giving. I just know how you'll respond. For me to be able to be that conduit of love and support that you people pour out, it's just an amazing blessing. I wish I could take every one of you and you could be the person and see the response.

Don. Dane, a couple of things. One, down there, the American dollar goes a lot further than it does here, right? So every every dollar that's given is far more impactful than we might think on this end.

Dane. Right. When I first started going, the ratio was 10 to 1. Now it's 20 to 1. And so inflation and everything has hit them horribly. So with Dan Hall is a field director, you know, I always ask him, okay, what are what are the specific needs? And if he knows anything, I always know that there are certain churches that, you know, they're in need continuously. You know, they're just very, very poor churches in certain areas. So they're always on the radar. But then as needs happen, we try to meet those. So again, thank you.

Don. So you can be looking for announcements and emails coming out to let you know when that opportunity to give is restarting. It'll probably be mid to late May for a mid July trip. And I thank you for representing us and representing the Lord to our brothers and sisters in Mexico. We appreciate what you do and the love and passion with which you do it. You set a great example for the rest of us about loving one another. So we appreciate that about you.

So to pivot now into church life matters a little bit more directly, most of you know that Nathaniel and I over the past several weeks have done some preaching on church membership. And there's a context, there's a context to that that I just want to allude to. Over the past two or three years, the elders have recognized that there seems to be a disconnect between what we teach and what we believe about church membership and

the way people understand it and the way that they practice it, and I remember several years ago, you know, I'm thinking of a couple of situations that almost none of you would know anything about, but there were a couple of people that came into membership and we received them into membership up front, and then like a month or two later, they wrote to us and said, you know, I'm leaving Truth Community Church. I don't want to be here anymore. And I'm like, oh, wait a second. You just came. You just became a member. What changed in four weeks that, you know, there's an obvious disconnect. And there have been other situations as well that we don't need to belabor here this evening that indicate that somewhere there is a disconnect between what we teach and what we believe about church membership and the commitment of love that it represents to an entire body as well as a commitment before the Lord. There's a disconnect between what should be a, you know, an open-ended deep commitment to a local body and the rather quick and hurried and superficial way that sometimes people choose to leave. And I say that not to, you know, air any dirty laundry or anything like that, but just to set a context for the discussion that's going to follow, the positive discussion that's going to follow here.

So for the benefit of those of you that are here, as elders we have spent many, many hours talking about this, trying to understand the dynamic that we are seeing. You know, we have a responsibility before the Lord to lead in a way that helps people appreciate and understand the local church and apparently somewhere along the line, we dropped the ball, we didn't get our job done based on the way that some reactions took place. And so for hours and hours and hours, we've talked about this over a few meetings, and our last meeting just a couple of weeks ago was especially edifying so I want you to kind of hear the things that we talked about around the table up on the second floor here.

And so, Nathaniel, let's start with you. Since we haven't heard from you yet. An easy way to do this, not too long ago, you had a Q&A session with the young adults and some of these matters came up and it seemed like there was an eager reception to what you had to say. Tell us about that and what you kind of drew from that interaction about the life in Truth Community Church.

Nathaniel. Sure, gladly. Yeah, we spent about two hours here on a Friday night with our young adults and they had sent in a number of really good questions ahead of time, and so we just interacted over those and it was very encouraging to see the seriousness with which our young adults are understanding the Christian life and desiring to participate in the life of the church. On the one hand, a number of questions reflected a sobriety about their own walk with the Lord. For example, asking about, you know, how do I cultivate a prayer life with all the pressing circumstances of life? How do I make prayer a priority and make that time with the Lord precious? And, you know, that's a wonderful, wonderful question and demonstrates a heart of love for the Lord and a heart to grow in the Lord. And I think another question was along the lines of how can we be a blessing to families and children and, you know, just interacting, being an example in the body and in the stage of life that we're in? And, you know, again, wow, that's a great point of interaction. Let's, you know, let's talk about that, because what's going on is there's an understanding that the individual following Christ is connected to the body of Christ and can contribute to the body of Christ. That's what Scripture says, we all contribute at the

end of Ephesians, the section of Ephesians there in verse 16, 4:16, where it talks about we all contribute in the measure that we've been gifted by the Lord. We all contribute as we join together and as we connect with one another. We're all contributing to the maturing and building up of the body in love. And a number of those questions reflected, first of all, the seriousness personally to know God, to love God, to live for God. It's what Paul desires in 1 Thessalonians 2 when he says we're pouring out our hearts so that you'll live in a way that pleases God. But not only in a selfish bubble way, it's about me living for God. No, it's how can I live for God so that I can be a contributor to the health of the body of the church? And that was just a wonderful interaction to see that our young people that are hearing the preaching of the word of God are thinking in that direction and desiring to cultivate that kind of mindset.

Don. A body operating together, not a silo standing alone, right?

Nathaniel. Yeah, exactly. And, you know, think about it this way. I've been thinking about this the last few days, the last couple of weeks, actually, for obvious reasons. But, you know, if your finger gets cut and, you know, it's very painful and maybe some infection comes in, you know, the worst thing you can do is cut your finger off. That's not going to heal the cut. Your cut, the cut needs all the systems of the body so that it heals. And that's the way that the body works, even when there are times when there's pain, because there is, we're people, we're dealing with the flesh, you know, we're in an evil age and there's going to be wounds, there's going to be struggles. And often when we're cut, when we're hurt, that's when we want to come away from the body but that's when you need the body the most even more.

Don. Yeah. Yeah. Andrew, that kind of fits in with something that you said this past at the last meeting as you talked about the body and commitment. You know, this is something far more than just a matter of vis-a-vis leadership. You know, you made a really good observation about the fullness of what it means. Talk about the commitment to the body.

Andrew. Well, the figure of speech given in Scripture that we are the body of Christ and as Nathaniel has alluded to, that, you know, if one member suffers, all members suffer. We do life together. And when we make the membership commitment, not only do the new members make a commitment to the existing members, but the existing members make a commitment to the new members and we make that commitment before God. It's exactly the same as the vows in a marriage. And you all know what happens that if one partner just walks out of the marriage without any discussion, the hurt and the pain that it causes not only to the other spouse, but to the children. And as I've talked to people in the congregation here and had meals and just talked about this, there's a lot of people in our fellowship that are hurting because of those who have left. They're confused. They were people that they had invested their time in and fellowship and these people just up and leave. They've lost their friends and they're hurting. And of course, that makes sense because we're one body. If the hand suddenly decides it's not going to work any longer and cuts itself off and goes wandering off, well, the whole body suffers and there's no understanding.

And one of the things I keep coming back to is the effect on the children. Now, we've had two situations recently and I'm going to be specific because I was specific with some friends here, some members here that I had a meal with some weeks ago, and this gives you an insight into what we're dealing with and the pain that it causes us as well as you if you are aware of these situations.

We had a particular family that we'd helped through difficult times. One of the family members had been to a membership class and brought a friend and was talking so effusively about the TCC fellowship and the way they helped, etc, etc. And a year later, there started to be problems and we reached out and tried to talk, and the last message we got, you know, will you come and talk to us? We want to be able to help you work through whatever it is that's bothering you because, you know, we want to love you and, you know, we're hurting and you must be hurting. "Well, I'll pray about it while I'm lying on the beach here in Florida." That was the last we heard. Do you think that hurts you? That's an insult to every other member in the church. Is that expressing love? No.

I was in my office some months ago and another family, I got a call and it was explained to me that the family was leaving the church. And so I just quietly and graciously, well, is there a reason? Can we talk about it? And a reason was given, but I knew immediately it was a bold face lie. And I thought to myself, what is that parent going to explain to his children, to the children in that family? See, I'm very conscious that we as adults, we're in an inter-generational fellowship here, everything we do is an example to children.

I have learned in my own family, things come out with our children years later about things. They're watching. They listen. And these things impact them. And the love that we have for one another in the church as members who are committed and if there are difficulties, let's sit down and talk through it in love. That's the way we work through issues together. We're not perfect. Definitely not. We understand that. But as Nathaniel has said in the sermon, we are answerable to the Lord for your souls and we take that seriously. So we want to be able to nurture you and love you and if you have difficulties or you don't understand something we've said, you might feel offended, then we want to be able to sit down and work that through with you because we want the body functioning as the way it should be. Remember, we're talking about the body of Christ. The good shepherd, what did he do with the sheep that was lost? He went out and found it. There was safety in the fold. He tended the sheep. He made sure they were fed. He made sure they were watered. That's our responsibility and we need your help to do that. It's a two-way process.

And so, you know, these are the images in Scripture that we have of the love, the interconnectedness of the body. We all need one another. We're all different from one another. Praise the Lord for that. It would be a boring world if we were all the same. We need one another. We've got different gifts. Some here have got gifts of fellowship and love and giving. Some people are praying quietly behind the scenes that others don't know about. It's wonderful. God is at work in our midst if we work together in harmony and unity. And I just said the other day, you think about it, the picture that we're looking at is the Godhead. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God made us for

fellowship with him just as he had fellowship there in the Godhead. Perfect communion, perfect love, perfect fellowship. That's the model that we're supposed to emulate. We're part of Christ's body and he's a member of that Godhead. And what is our ultimate destiny? To have fellowship with God for eternity just like Adam and Eve had fellowship with God and walked with God in the garden of Eden. And so what we model here is supposed to be a foretaste of what we can expect in heaven.

And so it's not that we're trying to preach to everybody. No, we just want to encourage one another to be faithful in commitment and loving and stir up a unity and a fellowship that will be modeled to our children and our grandchildren because they see and, you know, if they see that we have not walked the talk, then what are they going to decide to do when they make their own decisions? And then parents wonder why their children leave or their grandchildren don't follow. I mean it does happen. It does happen and for various reasons, not necessarily always because of the parents' fault, but you get the drift of what I'm saying. And so every one of us, I'm modeling to the children just as much as the parents are and so it's very important. We take this very seriously as a reflection of Christ's love for us should be reflected in our love for one another in the body.

Don. Yeah, what I hear you saying, Andrew, if I can put it in my own words, there's a perseverance in true love that should be operating in the body of Christ, a perseverance that reflects on the fact that God loves us and, you know, what he began he will perfect until the day of Christ Jesus. He loves us with a persevering love and that filters through in the way that we persevere in love with one another. Love wouldn't be necessary if we always got along. It's when issues come up that we most need to start exercising love and, you know, and renew our commitment is what I hear you saying.

Dane, let me, on a practical matter, you made an observation that I thought was insightful. You talked about the fact that we're not, this isn't Mayberry here, that we have a commuter church. What do you mean and how do you connect those two things together as it applies to what we're talking about here, life at Truth Community Church?

Dane. Well, just touching off of what Andrew just said about loving one another, Nathaniel has a good quote that he always says, the Christian life in the body of Christ is you're either repenting or you're forgiving. You know, one or the other. And that's going to be as human beings, as redeemed sinners get together, we're always going to be either repenting or forgiving one another. And so, I just wanted to say that.

I said, I think what you're referring to about being a commuter church is that, you know, just the reality of that. We don't have a lot of people that live within 10 minutes of the church. People are driving, you know, 45 minutes or more to get here and so we don't rub shoulders day by day by day. We're not seeing each other in the grocery store. We're not seeing each other on the, you know, the streets of Mayberry. We're not running into each other. And so that we lose sight, you know, because if you're living in a community that small, you're seeing each other, speaking to each other, and building unity even outside of the walls of the church. And so it makes it easier for people, you know, if you live 45 minutes away and you get your feathers ruffled a little bit to sequester yourself and stay

apart and, you know, if you had the opportunity of every day having to go to the factory and work with individuals and run into other people, they would be speaking truth into your life. And, you know, I'm not saying everybody needs to sell their house and move within 10 minutes of the church. That would be great if we could have that type of community. I was just stating the fact that, you know, that seems like that's part of the issue that we have to learn to work through, that if you do run into issues or, you know, we need to communicate, we need to talk, we need to, you know, you can't be satisfied with, you know, by throwing up your hands and just saying, "Well, I'm done." You know, we need to persevere with one another.

Don. Yeah. And these, it's important, I think, to just emphasize that these are things that we've been observing and talking about for a long period of time. This isn't something that's related to any individual or instance. This is, you know, this goes into it. So what you just said is that there's a practical aspect to it at Truth Community Church that affects us.

Nathaniel, you've talked about from a spiritual perspective the nature of, just the nature of life, life reality, and people sometimes don't necessarily connect their private walk with Christ with faithfulness to the local church. They're seen as distinct things that, you know, never the twain shall meet, you know. Talk about that and how they really are intimately connected with one another.

Nathaniel. Sure. And it's, you know, it's just an easy default that we can get into. Jesus says in, I think it's in Luke 21, he warns us to not be taken by the dissipations, by drunkenness, by the cares of this life, and he tells us that because we tend to be overtaken by dissipations, drunkenness, and the cares of this life. And the reality of, I need to go to work and I need to provide for my family and I have many, many pressures that occupy my mind throughout the day, it can be an easy dichotomy to make. You know, I do my thing during the week and then I go to church on Sunday. It's refreshing. But what I'm doing during the week doesn't necessarily contribute to church on Sunday or vice versa. And you know, what we find in Scripture is that as the gospel is clarified in the epistles and then as Christ-like thinking is constructed through the commands that flow out of that, that life in Christ is all-inclusive of our entire life. It involves all of our relationships and whether we're at church or in the home, we're living for Christ. And what we do as we're apart, scattered from one another in our spheres of service, in our spheres of influence where the Lord has called us, that contributes to the health of the church as well as we're individually making choices to please the Lord and to live as a light in a dark world, that contributes to what we do on Sunday. And so often on a positive trajectory, just thinking about this, as that becomes a reality and as a Christ-like mind is constructed more and more, the workplace and the home become the mission fields and there's an ownership of, I'm going to work, yes, to provide for my family, but more importantly to show forth Christ. I'm parenting and I'm responding to my parents and working out the marriage relationship in a way that lifts up Jesus Christ. And then what happens is I live my daily life with that conscious understanding that this is for the glory of God and this is to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ.

I find that it's hard, like Dane said, I'm having to repent and forgive a lot and I find a refreshed understanding of the spiritual warfare that I'm involved in and by that time I can't wait to get to church. I mean, bring me to church, get me there. Even if I'm sick and have to be quarantined in a room, whatever, I need to go to church. I need to be with the people of God. I need to hear the word of God. I need the fellowship. I need my body. I need to be connected because I'm out there trying to serve the Lord and I realize the great value of what's happening when we're together and I need it. Whereas if I'm looking at it from a consumer standpoint of, you know, all week long I earn my money so I can buy what I want and when I go to church, I go to church and I decide whether or not I'm going to give money there based on if I get what I like and can do what I want, right? So it's a complete reversal of that mentality. No, it's all about Christ.

It's all about Christ and that was something that obviously the Reformers captured in the idea of vocation, that whatever God has called me to do, I do it for Christ and the church as the body of Christ builds me up to live for Christ in all aspects of life and to live in such a way that I can discern what pleases Christ or seek to discern what pleases Christ 24/7, which is a process I'll be going through until I'm glorified. But that's the heart. I'm living for Christ. I want to live for Christ 24/7 so that what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, you know, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, no caveats, whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. And when that mindset begins to really assimilate in my thinking, there's a glorious refreshment in my own hunger for the fellowship of the body and knowing that my brothers and sisters in Christ, they're doing the same thing all week and, yes, I'm coming to church because I need to be fed and I need the fellowship and I need the encouragement and so does everyone else. And so we're coming together with that appetite for the word of God and with the anticipation of being a blessing to one another so that we continue then to work and serve wherever God has put us in Indiana or Northern Kentucky or Ohio so that we can do that for the glory of God as representatives, most importantly of the Lord Jesus Christ in calling people to repentance in him and building this church.

Don. Yeah, Andrew, kind of I want to set the context. You made an analogy to marriage, church commitment to marriage, and it's not quite the same unbreakable commitment, people move away, relocate for jobs, so we're not making that kind of one-to-one comparison but there is something, just a couple of personal things here. You know, I usually don't get into any kind of personal illustrations or anything, but this is not preaching and so it's a different kind of setting. Thinking of marriage, I don't mind you knowing, but don't tell anyone else, okay? This is just between us. You know, in the early years of our marriage, I made things pretty difficult for Nancy. In the first few years of our marriage it wasn't the after-flow of the romance that led up to it. You know, there were some tense meals and just in fairness, it was all my fault, okay? It was genuinely all my fault and whenever there have been difficulties in our relationship, that's always been true. But the point is that that was some 30-35 years ago. Now having stayed committed, having stayed together, now that we're on the other side of it, you know, there is a blessing and a deeper well to draw from, from having been through those hard times together and coming out together on the other side that's deeper than the superficial emotion that you have when you're first dating and when you get engaged and all of that. Those initial emotions are great, but there is a depth that is flowing in a long-standing

marriage that is, you know, has an even deeper sweeter aroma to it and a sweeter love to it. And so I'm grateful that, you know, we stayed together and, you know, now we get to enjoy the fruit of that, you know, even though it was, you know, it was rough at the start.

Well, building from that, you know, when I was, you know, we've been in a few different churches over the course of our marriage. I can remember back to being at a church where there we encountered some turbulent waters. It was difficult. I was unhappy. I was quite upset with, you know, some of the people that were around us. And in like manner, this is the point for tonight, in like manner, you know, the Lord kept us there, the Lord blessed us there, and the people where there was once estrangement at the start earlier on, by the end of the time there was a reconciliation and a sweetness of relationship that is profoundly special to me, a relationship, frankly, that I would have, you know, I would have thrown away for the sake of my momentary dissatisfaction. Now on the other side, with the commitment that carried that through to the glory of God, not to me, now some of those relationships are still exceedingly sweet, exceedingly peaceful, exceedingly supportive, and if I had practiced a consumer mindset in the church, said, I don't like this product, I'm going to go find another product, then I would have missed all of that blessing that the Lord had appointed for me to know, and I would have been greatly impoverished in my spiritual life as a result of it. And the reality is that as you, for those that bounce from church to church, the reality is you never know anything of meaningful relationships, because you don't know what it's like to work through problems and come out better on the other side of it. And marriage helps us get a glimpse into how that is supposed to work.

And you know, the whole point, and I'm going to end with this, the whole point of being forgiven by Christ in the context of the local church is that a like Spirit animates our interactions with one another in the body. And so Scripture could not be more explicit about this. Jesus, in his teaching on prayer, taught us to pray, "Father, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." He links our forgiveness from God with our willingness to forgive others. And in like manner, in Ephesians 4, the Apostle Paul, I'm just flipping to it here real quickly, actually, not very quickly. I'm just flipping to it in while trying to not lose your attention. You know, a few weeks ago I talked about under the Spirit's influence and how the Spirit influences us toward unity and life in the body, and Paul makes that point multiple times in the book of Ephesians. In verse 30 he says, "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." You were saved, the Spirit of God sealed you in Christ. And then he follows what flows from that is life in the body. He says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." In the context of the local church, to the church at Ephesus, he says this, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." And, you know, sometimes those are hard lessons that we have to, you know, it's hardship that makes us appreciate the significance of what Scripture says there but it's God's design for us not to walk away, not to run away at the first sign of trouble. Marriage isn't designed that way, neither is local church membership. If there's dissatisfaction or questions or things like that, you know, we work through them like a committed husband and wife do and we come out better and deeper related on the other side.

So we're kind of at an end point here. But Dane, you're the chairman of our elder board. Maybe you could wrap things up with a closing word to just kind of summarize things before Nathaniel closes us in prayer.

Dane. We've had a lot to say tonight and membership is serious. We take it serious and we hope you take it serious. There's accountability on both ends. You're accountable to live godly lives and to love one another, and we're accountable to shepherd your souls. We'll both stand before God, you for your accountability and us for ours. And so we call you to unity. We call you to Christ-likeness, to godliness. And we call you to pray for us as leaders. This isn't an easy job. As I said, we'll stand one day before God on how well we do this job. And so pray for us. Pray for your leaders. We need it. And so...

Don. And we pray for you.

Dane. Right.

Don. Yes, thank you, Dane. Nathaniel, you want to close this time and then David will come back up and lead a closing hymn.

Nathaniel. Lord Jesus, we love you, we love your church, and all of this is because you first loved us and we praise you for the redeeming sacrifice on the cross that purchased your people to build your body, to await your return. We thank you for the abundance of spiritual blessings that you have given to us. Thank you for the Spirit of God that dwells within believers to create unity and to strengthen us to pursue unity even when it is difficult, but to pursue unity as we pursue Christ. We thank you for TCC, and we thank you for each member of this body, and we thank you for the wonderful work that you are accomplishing as the word of God is preached, as the regenerating work of the Spirit draws people to yourself, and as disciples grow in likeness to Jesus Christ. And we pray for your continued blessing. We pray that your hand would be obvious in its work in our midst. We pray for your protection from evil, from our adversary, the devil, that hates the church, that hates the people of God. We pray that you would give us grace to persevere and to fight the good fight in anticipation of the day that we will stand before you and that we'll all give an account for our work. We thank you for the righteousness of Christ in which we will stand and we praise you for the privilege of serving you and of loving you. And we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thanks for listening from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find more church information and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com teaching God's people God's word. This message is copyrighted. All rights reserved.